

MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG PLANNING COMMISSION

June 8, 2011

The Harrisonburg Planning Commission held its regular meeting on Wednesday, June 8, 2011, at 7:00 p.m. in the City Council Chambers, 409 South Main Street.

Members present: Charles Chenault, MuAwia Da'Mes, Judith Dilts, Alan Finks, Deb Fitzgerald, and Henry Way.

Members absent: Bill Jones.

Also present: Stacy Turner, Director of Planning and Community Development; Adam Fletcher, City Planner; Alison Banks, Planner and Secretary.

Vice Chairman Fitzgerald called the meeting to order and determined there was a quorum with six of seven members in attendance. She then asked if there were any corrections, comments or a motion regarding the minutes from the May 11th Planning Commission meeting.

Mr. Chenault moved to approve the minutes from the May 11, 2011 Planning Commission meeting.

Mr. Finks seconded the motion.

All voted in favor of approving the minutes. (6-0)

New Business

Rezoning/Master Plan Amendment – VMRC Woodland Greenhouses 2011 Amendment

Vice Chairman Fitzgerald read the request and asked staff to review.

Mrs. Banks said the Comprehensive Plan designates this area as Institutional. These lands are designated for development by certain nonprofit and public institutional uses such as colleges and universities, hospitals, offices of nonprofit organizations, community assembly uses and institutions which provide for the shelter and care of people.

The following land uses are located on and adjacent to the property:

Site: Woodland facility (under demolition) and single-family homes, zoned R-3/I-1

North: Crestwood assisted living facility and Oak Lea nursing facility, zoned R-3/I-1

East: Across Virginia Avenue, undeveloped parcel, non-conforming dwellings and commercial properties, zoned B-2

South: Across Parkwood Drive, VA Mennonite Conference Center and undeveloped parcel, zoned B-2

West: Single-family dwellings, zoned R-3 and Eastern Mennonite University, zoned R-3/I-1

The original master plan for Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community (VMRC) was approved in March 1997 and has been amended on several occasions. The most recent amendment was approved in December 2009, which allowed for the construction of ten Green House Homes in the Woodland area of the VMRC property. As described by VMRC, Green House Homes are residential homes for up to ten occupants requiring skilled nursing care. Each home has ten private rooms and bathrooms, a central kitchen, dining and living area, and around-the-clock nursing care. The December 2009 master plan illustrated the Green House Homes as a micro-community, clustered around gardens and a community park. Both Planning Commission and City Council voted unanimously in favor of the Green House Homes concept, which necessitates the demolition of the original Woodland facility building and the nearby single-family homes.

Following the 2009 approval, the applicants began working on the design and layout of the homes and the associated private street. As the project progressed, it became obvious that the placement of the stormwater detention area would require shifting some of the homes and redesigning the private loop road. This change made the community park smaller and created difficulty for all of the homes to meet building separation and setback requirements. After discussions with staff, it was determined the best option would be to request a master plan amendment with the redesigned Green House Home layout utilizing the relief mechanisms and flexibility allowed within the Institutional Overlay District.

VMRC is requesting a change to their December 2009 approved Institutional Overlay Master Plan. The I-1, Institutional Overlay District is a special overlay district, placed over a base district, and is intended to provide for orderly development of certain nonprofit institutional uses and institutions providing for the shelter and care of persons. It allows for flexibility with setbacks, building height, and parking requirements through the master plan process.

With the current request, VMRC would like to maintain their existing master plan, which includes the skilled nursing care provided in the ten Green House Homes. As mentioned above the major change in the master plan is to allow for flexibility in building separation and setback requirements. Thus, the master plan specifies that building separation between some of the homes could be as close as 20-feet, as opposed to the required 30-feet. In addition, setbacks are shown as 20-feet from both Parkwood Drive and Virginia Avenue, and 10-feet from interior property lines. The applicant has stated that it is not their intention to build each home to these setbacks; but, it would offer the flexibility should buildings need to be shifted. The setbacks as presented deviate from the required 30-feet from public streets and the ten and 25-foot setbacks for the interior lines.

The Public Works Department is requesting right-of-way along Parkwood Drive in order to bring the current right-of-way to a point 30-feet from the existing street centerline on their side of the road. As well, they are asking for an additional four feet of right-of-way along Virginia Avenue. This is indicated on the master plan site drawing. Both would be dedicated during the comprehensive site plan review. The requested relief for the front setbacks from 30-feet to 20-feet would allow the applicant to construct the ten homes after the right-of-way dedication and still have the ability to shift the buildings, should it be necessary.

The Green House Homes would front along an internal private loop road, which enters from Oak Drive, a separate, existing private road within the VMRC community. The existing Parkwood Drive entrance would be phased out, becoming a service entrance and fire lane. Each home would have a driveway to accommodate one vehicle and 22 additional spaces would be provided along the loop road. The applicant has noted that the total number of parking spaces for the VMRC campus is 644. This is a slight increase from the previously approved master plan and is more than sufficient for their needs.

As stated in 2009, this is an innovative and unique approach to nursing home living. The relief and flexibility in building setbacks and separation allows for the clustering of homes and the preservation of open space, concepts supported by the Comprehensive Plan. Staff supports the request to amend this portion of the VMRC Master Plan.

Vice Chairman Fitzgerald asked if there were any questions for staff.

Mr. Da'Mes asked what are the small buildings or structures along the emergency access route.

Mrs. Banks said they are structures for Harrisonburg Electric Commission; backup generators.

Mr. Da'Mes asked about dumpsters on the site.

Mr. Chenault replied that he believes VMRC has trash pick-up.

Mrs. Banks suggested that the applicant could better answer that question.

Mr. Way asked staff to review the changes from the 2009 approved master plan site design as compared to the current proposal.

Staff described how two of the buildings would be shifted south to make more area for the stormwater detention area. Also, the road through the complex would be less winding and more of a straight loop and there is an emergency access road proposed with the new site design.

Mr. Da'Mes asked if the applicants would be required to install sidewalk along Virginia Avenue.

Mrs. Banks replied that sidewalk already exists.

Vice Chairman Fitzgerald asked if there were any further questions. Hearing none, she opened the public hearing and asked if the applicant or applicant's representative would like to speak.

Mr. Richard Johnson of Blackwell Engineering said they are the engineers working on the site design for the VMRC project. I do not have anything more specific to add, but if you have questions regarding the design I would be happy to answer them.

Mr. Marvin Nicely, Vice President at VMRC, said thank you for considering our request. I just wanted to say a few words about this project and the Green House concept. We believe this is a very important concept for the future of VMRC; we want to change how nursing care is provided for people who need this type of assistance as they grow older. In simple terms we want to de-institutionalize nursing care and put our elders into a house that more closely resembles a house that they were more accustomed to living in. Again, thank you for your consideration on this and thank you to the staff for their assistance.

Vice Chairman Fitzgerald asked if there was anyone else wishing to speak in favor of or opposed to the request. Hearing none, she closed the public hearing and asked Planning Commission for discussion or a motion.

Mr. Chenault moved to recommend approval of the amendment to the VMRC Master Plan.

Dr. Dilts seconded the motion.

Vice Chairman Fitzgerald said there is a motion to recommend approval and a second. She then called for a voice vote.

All voted in favor (6-0) of the motion.

Vice Chairman Fitzgerald said the motion to recommend approval carries to City Council on July 12th.

Unfinished Business

None.

Public Input

None.

Report of secretary and committees

Mrs. Banks said proactive zoning targeted the Avalon Woods Sector of the City, where they found 11 violations consisting of inoperable vehicles, discarded materials, and signage. Next month the Zoning inspectors will be inspecting the Waterman Elementary area.

Other Matters

Mr. Fletcher said he has one item he wanted to bring up. Back in 2008 there was discussion and desire to write new landscaping requirements; however, it was decided not to pursue it at the time because we were still working on the Mixed Use zoning classification. Then we went to work on the Comprehensive Plan. Now that both of those are finished, is it still the desire of the Planning Commission to continue to move forward with a new landscaping proposal? We have a working draft, but it needs to be reviewed before it is ready to come before this body for your review.

Mr. Way asked for further explanation of the ordinance.

Mr. Fletcher said our current landscape requirements within the Zoning Ordinance are rather minimal, to say the least. The regulation requires that you landscape an area that is fifteen percent of the paved area used for parking and maneuvering on site. That requirement is for all parking lots except Industrial zoning uses. This would be a proposed amendment to “beef-up” that requirement.

If you are still interested in working on this, it would be one of our thirteen strategies that we proposed to work towards in the newly adopted Comprehensive Plan.

Planning Commission agreed that the landscape requirements should be worked on at this time.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Chairman William L. Jones, Jr.

Secretary, Alison Banks